Film Review: Assamese Thriller “Abhimanyu” Fumbles Revenge Plot

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The Assamese film *Abhimanyu*, released on November 15th under Sabnam’s Entertainments, tackles a story of revenge, cover-ups, and moral dilemmas in a society grappling with corruption.

Directed by Achinta Shankar and edited by Protim Khaound, the film features Kamal Lochan as the protagonist Prabhat, alongside Deeplina Deka (Jyotsna), Debajit Mazumdar (Jayanta Mazumdar), Hiranya Deka (Rahman), Amrita Gogoi (Advocate Sharmistha Konwar), Bhagawat Pritam (Dr. Keshab Kakati), Rajiv Goswami (Anirban Barua), Sharafat Ali (Shankar Jyoti Rajkhowa), and an ensemble cast.

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Despite its intriguing premise, *Abhimanyu* falters in execution, leaving viewers confused by underdeveloped subplots, an inconsistent tone, and exaggerated characters. (Note: This review contains spoilers from this point forward)

Abhimanyu explores themes of systemic corruption, loss, and the pursuit of justice. It centers around the brutal rape and murder of Jyotsna, which sends her partner Prabhat on a relentless quest for vengeance. Wrongfully accused and seeking justice, he and his friends kidnap five individuals linked to the crime. The kidnapping leads to a tense game of cat-and-mouse with Jayanta Mazumdar, an encounter specialist police officer investigating the crime. The movie concludes with Prabhat successfully exposing the truth, leading to the people’s punishment of all the culprits (except Sharmistha Konwar).

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a backdrop, highlighting the struggles of people during that period—job losses, family losses, and the isolation that came with them. Through Prabhat and Jyotsna's characters, the director tries to portray the selfless efforts of those who risked their own safety to help others during the pandemic.

The film's critique of social institutions – media, politics, healthcare, and law enforcement – has potential but is marred by overly simplistic villains and forced symbolism. The antagonists, reduced to caricatures of evil, feel hollow rather than layered representations of corruption.

The acting delivers a functional performance at best. While Kamal Lochan's portrayal of Prabhat shows moments of intensity, it doesn't quite reach its full potential. The chemistry between him and Deeplina Deka is acceptable, but neither performance is particularly memorable. Debajit Mazumdar's portrayal of Jayanta, the frantic, alcoholic, rebellious cop tasked with finding the kidnapped and tracking down the culprits, tries to add complexity to the plot, but ultimately falls short. His transformation from a relentless pursuer to a morally conflicted individual is rushed and lacks credibility.

The investigative work of Officer Jayanta and Officer Moniraj Das suffers from serious shortcomings. Given his introduction, Jayanta shows nothing more than forced humor. Additionally, the scene of a youth being shot by Jayanta in the marketplace with no reaction from bystanders is simply unrealistic. Officer Jayanta remembering to interview the night-duty guard at the COVID center on the fateful night of Jyotsna's rape-murder comes across as an afterthought, highlighting a basic oversight that severely undermines his credibility. Ethical hacker Nilofer, the "B.Tech from IIT," adds little to the investigation besides childlike enthusiasm, failing to bring any real expertise to the narrative.

While Jayanta frantically searches for Prabhat, the film blames a misplaced file during the police station relocation for the entire investigation's delay. This excuse lacks believability. Surely basic avenues like checking a marriage certificate or court records would have been obvious steps to find information on Prabhat.

The sudden revelation that Sharmistha Konwar is pregnant appears to be a deliberate choice to exempt her from the severe consequences faced by the other antagonists. It suggests the director chose to spare her – perhaps due to her gender. This is further complicated by Sharmistha's abrupt change of heart when she learns that Jyotsna was pregnant at the time of her rape murder. It implies an inconsistency in her character's morals, suggesting that rape and murder are acceptable to her – until she discovers the victim was pregnant. This arbitrary moral line undermines the authenticity of Sharmistha's transformation, making it feel forced and unconvincing.

The film suffers from an excess of unnecessary scenes that add little to the overall narrative. Examples include the irrelevant conversation between Contractor Chaliha and the Chief Minister about fund release, the pointless bedroom discussion between

Sharafat Ali and his partner, and the bridge scene involving a car conversation between the circle officer and her partner. These moments serve as distractions rather than meaningful contributions to the plot.

The film's portrayal of the mental health institute raises ethical concerns. Its depiction of a mental hospital as a dark, foreboding place reinforces harmful stereotypes about mental health facilities. The use of "electric shock therapy," also known as Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), is strictly mandated under the Mental Health Care Act (MHCA) of 2017 as a last resort. It is performed under strict medical supervision, with the use of anesthesia and muscle relaxants. Such misrepresentation not only trivializes mental health treatment but could potentially discourage people from seeking help.

Additionally, *Abhimanyu* resorts to cheap attempts at humor with crude sexual innuendos, such as the dialogue "kaath futaboloi gojaalo daangor lagibo," which feels jarringly out of place in a film tackling such serious themes. The inclusion of viral internet catchphrases like "ruko jara, sabar karo," along with a scene featuring a journalist mimicking the viral clip of Pakistani reporter Chand Nawab's "Karachi se," comes off as both lazy and uninspired. While these references might provoke a few chuckles, it's crucial for the filmmaker to recognize that the audience's laughter is directed at the familiarity of the memes, and not the film's own comedic merits. Therefore, any humor derived from these moments cannot truly be attributed to the film's creativity.

Ironically, the film's subtitles provide more "comic relief" than the actual dialogue. Mistakes like "Cornell Goswami" instead of "Colonel Goswami," or Colonel Goswami's dialogue, "I have a new mission, Mission Russia" as "I have a new issue," unintentionally add a layer of humor.

Abhimanyu sets out with the ambition of merging social issues with a gripping revenge storyline, yet it struggles to achieve either goal effectively. The film's attempt at social critique feels surface-level, and its revenge narrative lacks the intensity required to make a lasting impression. Instead of a nuanced exploration of regional themes, the movie offers a disjointed experience that leans heavily on clichés and convenient plot devices. For audiences hoping for a thought-provoking Assamese film, *Abhimanyu* falls short, leaving behind a lackluster and ultimately forgettable experience.